Elementary Staff Administrative Rep Job

By: Chris Berghammer

**Rationale**

Elementary staff meetings have been a Thursday morning routine since I started teaching 13 years ago. The idea behind the meetings was to get the elementary staff together to talk about issues and upcoming events, and to build positive relationships among the members of the staff. We have became so “routine” in how we do things in the elementary that nothing ever changed. The meetings turned into a “gab session” with various side conversations going on. Other staff members used the meetings as a platform to complain about anything and everything. It seemed like there was always something to complain about but rarely a solution offered. To sum things up, our weekly morning meetings were viewed by the staff as very negative and pretty much a waste of time.

I decided that something needed to be done to change the issues that were occurring in our weekly meetings. I asked our administrator if I could volunteer for the position of elementary rep. She said I just needed to ask the current rep if she would be willing to give it up. She was very willing to do so and offered me help if I needed it along the way. I targeted a few areas that I felt were of the greatest concern: the negative emotions the staff had towards the staff meetings, the lack of productivity in the meetings, the lack of organization in the meetings (the fact that the meetings were running past the allotted time frame), and to changing how many times we met per month.

**Competencies Met**

I started this new adventure at the beginning of the school year. I knew I had to be organized and positive. I had conversations with our administrator about setting up an all staff schedule where we had a full staff meeting once per month, grade level meetings once per month, and elementary staff meetings twice per month. **(Leadership #1 servant, moral, and collaborative)** That went over very well.

I figured we could be more productive if we met less and did more things via email. **(Leadership #9 effective communication and Principalship #8 communication and technology)** I did not want to waste staff members’ valuable time talking about things that could be done over email. **(Leadership #2 organization and vision)** I wanted to use that time to solve problems, have conversations about real issues, and to build positive relationships. **(Leadership #7 effective environment and Leadership #9 effective communication)** I sent out agendas every Wednesday so the staff was aware of what we would be doing and had time to think about things that we would be covering. I sent out meeting minutes on Fridays to make sure the staff was clear on what we discussed**. (Leadership #9 effective communication and Principalship #8 communication and technology)** I tried to keep the meetings to the agenda and on time. This is sometimes easier said than done, but I have used a stopwatch to make sure we stayed on task. I have also introduced the “6 hats of thinking” concept to make sure we discussed issues appropriately. **(Decision-Making #3 consensus and Decision-Making #8 change process)** By doing these things, I felt that it would automatically cut down on the side conversations between staff.

One of my more challenging jobs was organizing a supervision schedule for the elementary teaching staff and support staff. It had to include all staff members, be fair and equal, and had to cover supervision for the lunchroom, noon and afternoon recesses, and before school entrance area. Staff needed to have their 30 minute duty free time and specials times had to be considered. **(Leadership #6 integrity, ethics, and fairness and School Law #4 discrimination)** I also needed to make sure we had enough staff on duty to cover the given assignment and couldn’t be two people from the same grade level at the same time. I asked each teacher to email me their duty preference in hopes that I could make it work for each of them. I also had to collaborate with the lunchroom ladies to find out what time they could start taking kids and how much time they needed between classes. I also had to work with the Physical Education teachers to find out what time the gym would be open if we ran into any inclement weather and needed to have inside recess. I did have the opportunity to collaborate with our administrator and another staff member when it was time to “fine tune” what I had put together. **(Principalship #4 supervision and evaluation of personnel, Learner Centered Leadership #3 supervision and evaluation, Administration of Curriculum and Instruction #1 supervision, and Human Resources #4 supervision models)**

Along with putting the schedule together, I found that our lunchroom and recess rules were very out-dated. I decided to use the experts to help me with this process. (**Leadership #5 change process, Decision Making #3 consensus and #5 long range strategic planning, and Principalship #7 school reform)** I found an old rules sheet for both recess and the lunchroom. I gave copies of each to the elementary staff prior to our meeting. We had a very efficient meeting and put the rules in place relatively quickly. I feel as if the staff had not had time to brainstorm the rules, we would have not gotten anywhere in our meeting. We also decided that it would be wise for each teacher to model desired behaviors in their classroom morning meetings.

I also had the opportunity to help with our fire evacuation plan. We worked to get a much faster and efficient method to make sure each student is accounted for. We have a checkpoint where all elementary students go and a procedure where each student must check in with their teacher. The teacher then checks in with the administrator at that checkpoint to make sure that teacher and students are accounted for. The administrators check at each level check in with each over radios to make sure the elementary, middle school, and high school each have their students accounted for. **(Facilities #5 disaster preparedness and School Community #8 crisis management)**

I was able to coordinate with the county to bring in a Nutrition specialist to work with grades 1, 3, and 5. She came into the 1st and 3rd grade classrooms 5 times for 30 minute periods. She visited the 5th grade classrooms 3 times for 45 minute periods. I also coordinated with the local fire department to set up a schedule so they could meet with each grade JK-5 about fire prevention. I organized a “Best Practices” sharing session at one of our morning meetings. **(Human Resources #3 staff development programs, Learner Centered Leadership #5 beginning teachers, Curriculum Instruction #7 research: best practices, and Administration of Curriculum and Instruction #3 standards)** I have also attended a local Parent Group meeting as the representative for the Clayton Elementary. **(Human Resources #9 community support, Principalship #3 role in community, and School Community #4 sensitivity to families and #6 public relations)** This has been a very challenging, yet rewarding new role for me. I feel like this is a leadership role I want to continue in for preparation for a Principal job down the road.

**Supporting Research**

According to William Glaser in “The Quality School” we should be changing our thinking from using the model of boss-management to the model of lead-management. His thinking was meant more in the relationship between teacher and student than in the relationship between administrator and teacher, but I think it is basically the same concept. The four essential elements to boss-management are as follows:

-The boss sets the tasks and standards for what the workers are to do without consultation from the workers.

-The boss usually tells, rather than shows, the workers how the work is to be done and rarely asks for their input.

-The boss inspects the work. The worker is not involved in the evaluation, so they tend to settle for being good enough to get by.

-When there is confrontation, the boss uses coercion to get what they want. This creates adversarial relationship between boss and worker.

The more favorable approach that Glaser prefers is the lead-management approach. The four essential elements to lead-management are as follows:

-The leader discusses with the workers about the quality of the work and the time needed to complete it. The worker has an opportunity to add input and suggestions to the discussion. The leader tries to fit the job to the skills and needs of the worker.

-The leader models the job so the workers can see the expectations. The leader continues to ask for input and more efficient methods to complete tasks.

-The leader asks workers to evaluate their own work for quality. The leader is working from the premise that the worker knows a great deal about high-quality work and respects that knowledge.

-The leader works as a facilitator in that it is shown to the workers that the leader has done everything possible to provide them with the best workplace possible.

I wanted to be more of a “leader” than a “boss” in my new role as an elementary representative. In my experiences, I felt like Glaser was totally correct in his thinking that workers under the leaders were far more likely to put quality into their work. Boss managers also fail to understand that all motivation comes from within the person. When people have an opportunity to be involved in their work and treated with respect, I believe they will naturally work much harder and do a much better job. I also really found it quite interesting what Glaser’s “Choice Theory” says about the five basic needs of human beings: survival, love, power, fun, and freedom. When leaders can appeal to at least one of these basic needs, the worker will find the task much more appealing and will put more time and quality into their work. Glaser says that if we ask our students to do tasks that do not satisfy at least on of their basic needs, the students will do poorly or may not even do it at all. I think this correlates very well with the administrator and teacher relationship. I wanted to work with the staff in our projects and I wanted to make sure they had input and felt ownership as well. I have also tried to make sure to satisfy at least one of their basic needs. Allowing the staff to have some fun, to have some freedom, to give them more responsibility and more ownership, and gearing certain tasks to certain teachers keeping their likes and dislikes in mind, and treating them like professionals are all very simple ways I have found to satisfy the needs of the elementary staff that I am currently working with.

Prior to this school year, I re-read a book called “ WINNING EVERY DAY” by Lou Holtz. Lou Holtz is an ex-football coach who is now considered one of the greatest motivational speakers in the country. In this book, Coach Holtz basically lays out what he considers “The Game Plan for Success”. This is not a football coaching book, although he often does rely on his football coaching experiences; it is a book about life and choices. It is also about relationships, devotion, leadership, and compassion. He talks about what it takes to be a good human being and be respected by friends, family, and colleagues. He explains how the same things he used to be a winning football coach can also be used in winning the battles of daily life. I really focused on Chapter 10, which is called “Do You Care About Me?” for my usage in this project. I feel like teaching is a “people business” first and foremost. Treating people in the best ways possible, I felt like that was the best way to work as the “lead person” in the elementary staff. Lou Holtz talks about how by concerning yourself with the welfare of others, you engender loyalty and respect. He quoted something that I think makes a lot of sense, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” I think this was very useful advice, especially in my case where most of the staff is older and more experienced than I am. Communication and having conversations with colleagues are very important pieces in our business and I learned in this chapter the importance of not dominating those conversations. Coach Holtz warned that if you dominate every conversation you have, you’re broadcasting that you don’t care about anyone but yourself. He gave advice that if you are a leader who has trouble hearing what people are saying because you are too busy thinking about what you are going to say next, try clearing your brain. Focus on the lips of the person you are having a conversation with and watch they way they form words. He says you will suddenly start hearing people in a new way. Being a head coach myself, I find myself at times leading too many conversations and focusing more on the appropriate response than on what is being said. This was a good learning tool for me. He is a firm believer in having positive relationships with people and treating people with respect. He goes on to give some very simple and effective advice for dealing with people.

-Don’t wait for a crisis to show people you care.

-Be thoughtful.

-Always consider the sensitivity and needs of others.

-Be aware of how your actions hinder or help.

-Give a kind word whenever possible. Even the most negative people will in time change their demeanor.

I wanted to change our meetings by modeling a positive approach to the tasks at hand. We all know our tasks in the educational world are non-stop and forever changing. Through my experiences I have learned that through collaboration more can be achieved and it can be achieved much quicker. I wanted my colleagues to feel comfortable lending their ideas and feel like their efforts would be worth their time invested. I really enjoyed this book. Through my experience as the elementary rep and from reading this book, I learned how important relationships are and how much people are willing to help if you if you treat them right.

Another resource that was very important to this project was the “Six Thinking Hats” by Edward de Bono. One of my goals was to change the way our meetings were administered and conducted. To sum it up, I felt like nothing was really getting accomplished in our meetings. The meetings lacked organization and positive energy and ideas. We had a Fifth grade teacher come to one of our Master’s classes last summer to talk to us about the “6 Thinking Hats” and how well it worked in her classroom. She was very into the method of holding meetings and having discussions. She had found many positive things that had come from her usage of this method in her classrooms. I figured that if it could work in the classroom with kids, it would be worth a shot trying it with adults in our staff meetings. The “6 Thinking Hats” model consists of 6 different metaphorical hats that each define a different type of thinking. The 6 colored hats and descriptions of the type of thinking they each describe are as follows:

-White Hat: When you put on your white hat, you focus directly on the information. The white hat allows you to present information in a neutral and objective way. Possible questions: What information do we have here? What information are we missing? What information would we like to have? How are we going to get the information?

-Yellow Hat: Yellow hat thinking is a deliberate search for the positive. The yellow hat is for optimism and the logical positive view of things. Possible questions: What are the benefits of this option? Why is this proposal preferable? What are the positive assets of this design? How can we make this work?

-Black Hat: Wearing the black hat allows you to consider your project critically and logically. The black hat allows you to evaluate with caution. Possible questions/concerns: This design looks nice, but it is not practical. This project is great, but it is way too expensive. This material involved would be very high maintenance.

-Red Hat: Putting on your red hat, you express what you feel about the project. The red hat allows feelings to come into the discussion. The red hat covers intuition, feelings, and hunches. Possible questions/concerns: My gut-feeling is that this will not work. The proposal of this project is terrible. I don’t like the way this situation is being handled.

-Green Hat: The green hat is concerned with creating new ideas and new ways of looking at things. Green hat thinking makes time and space available to focus on creative thinking. Possible questions: Could we do this in a different way? Could there be another explanation? Are there any additional alternatives?

-Blue Hat: The blue hat is for thinking about thinking. Wearing the blue hat means you are controlling and organizing the thinking process so that is becomes more productive. Possible questions/concerns: Looking not at the subject, but at the thinking about the subject. Could we have a summary of your views? I suggest we put on our green hats to get some new ideas.

My focus was to put more “Yellow Hats” and more “ Green Hats” in our meeting. We have had plenty “Black Hat” thinking in our meetings. I understand that there is a time and a place for that type of thinking, but I also know that it is hard to keep people moving and staying positive when “Black Hats” are the majority of the population. Along with the “Black Hat” thinkers, we have also seen a lot of “Red Hats” in our group. I think that makes sense; when things are negative then emotions get involved. We have many staff members who are great fact finders and are a wonderful asset as “White Hat” thinkers. I also feel like we typically have the “Blue Hat” covered as well. I know success comes when all the “6 Thinking Hats” are present or can be called upon when needed. I handed out a basic sheet to the staff that described Edward de Bono’s thinking theory. I chatted with them how this could be used in their classrooms. I then asked them about the possibility of using and referring to it in our morning meetings. I felt like they were very receptive to it. We all agreed that our meetings needed more “Yellow Hat” and “Green Hat” thinking to go along with the obvious “White Hat” thinking that we needed to solve problems. I feel like this has made our meetings more productive and I also feel like there is far less tension in the air.

**So What?**

Overall, I wanted to choose a project that would give me some administrative experience. I wanted to also choose something that I thought would have a positive impact on our school. I felt like my choice of being the elementary administrative representative accomplished both of those goals. I have had other leadership roles such as being a head coach, a lead person on a construction site, and a classroom teacher. I really enjoy being in those types of positions. I like being the person who has a direct impact on a final say in situations. I also enjoy new challenges and working with people. The whole idea of taking this Master’s program was because I was feeling as though I needed a new challenge in my work life. I enjoy being a teacher, but I desired a position that gave me more authority and a greater ability to make change. Knowing that earning a Masters would take some time and then finding an administrative position could also take a few years, I felt like this new role would satisfy my needs for the time being. I have really enjoyed the opportunity to be in charge, but also get to know my colleagues in a new light. I have found that being a fellow teacher and being a lead-person is two very different things. I have really noticed that my fellow colleagues look at me from a different view and I honestly believe they have a new respect for what I am trying to do. They all know that I am in an administrative Master’s program and they respect me for that, but I also believe they have really taken notice in the changes I am trying to make. This whole experience has also really forced me to reflect on what I am doing in the classroom. As the lead-person, it is important to be able to “walk-the-walk”. I must make sure I am doing what I am asking the elementary staff to do. I need to make sure I am positive, up beat, and organized. I have used the same things with this project that I have used to make myself a successful head coach. I needed a plan for success that my fellow coaches and my players would buy into. I needed to implement it in a way that people would believe and I needed to be organized. I needed to make sure I had answers to questions. I needed to make sure everyone involved felt ownership in the process. There are tough decisions to make at times, but if you treat people fairly and with respect they will be able to see the big picture. This project has really given me insight on how to lead adults and how to create a vision that people were comfortable in following.